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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ANGRY POPULAR REACTION TO DISSIDENT HOANG MINH CHINH'S RETURN TO HANOI

1. (SBU) Dissident Hoang Minh Chinh returned to Hanoi from Ho Chi Minh City on December 1. The 83-year-old Chinh informed us late that day that, when he arrived home at 11:30 a.m., he was greeted by a crowd of about 150 men aged 30-50 years old. No one in Chinh's family recognized these men and, conversing with POL Assistant, Chinh's neighbors confirmed that none of them were from the surrounding neighborhood. The men shouted epithets at Chinh and threw tomatoes and eggs at him as his family tried to protect him while he made his way into the narrow lane that leads to his home. He was able to get into his house, but fifty men forced their way into the lane and a small courtyard in front of his home and proceeded to break his windows with sticks and rocks. Once the windows were broken, the men threw eggs and tomatoes into the home.

2. (SBU) At this point, Chinh told us, he called Pham Chuyen, the former director of the Hanoi Police and a member of the National Assembly, but Pham refused to intervene, allegedly because he had just relinquished his police duties. Members of Chinh's family then tried to call the current director, but his staff said he was unavailable. Chinh's family members also called local police, some of whom showed up, but they refused to intervene because the "protesters have the right to express their anger against Chinh." By 2:45 p.m. the situation deteriorated and, again according to Chinh, the crowd started "beating" members of his family, including his son-in-law, sister and cousin (NFI on the extent of injuries). At this point, some protesters started to try to break down the door. A bystander wearing what Chinh described as a police uniform then shouted "that's enough!" and the crowd dispersed.

3. (SBU) Embassy spoke again with Chinh December 2, and he said that there had been no further incidents at his residence. Adding further details to his description of the previous day's events, Chinh said that at least four policemen, including a deputy chief, from the metropolitan "113" quick-deployment task force, were present. However, they did not intervene, claiming that the protesters were acting out of frustration with Chinh's anti-GVN statements while traveling in the United States. Chinh reported that his neighbors later told him that, before he arrived at home, uniformed policemen were in the area, in addition to cameramen who later filmed the protest.

4. (SBU) Poloff discussed this incident at some length on December 2 with a sophisticated MFA officer who is also a staunch Communist Party member. The MFA officer questioned the significance of the claimed violence and said that an "angry reaction" to Chinh's return was predictable. Chinh, he stressed, had gone to extremes not just in his criticism of the Communist Party (which most Vietnamese take in stride) but also in what the Vietnamese public perceived as insults to relatively recent national heroes. This had "embarrassed" the nation, which enraged patriotic Vietnamese. (Note: Our urbane, U.S.-educated MFA contact was quite emotional on this subject, saying that Chinh "spit on my father and grandfather." This level of intensity was unprecedented in our long association with him. End Note.)

5. (SBU) Poloff noted that the GVN's forbearance in not arresting Chinh for having made anti-regime statements had been noticed in human rights communities around the world, and added that the Hanoi police had failed to carry out their duties when they allowed the mob to veer into violence. How the GVN treats those who committed those illegal acts of violence would now be carefully watched, Poloff continued, as an indicator of whether the violence was supported by the Government. The MFA officer conceded the point, but noted that the GVN's decision not to arrest or prosecute Chinh for his crimes would be tougher to sustain if it brought charges against those who were protesting his actions.

6. (SBU) The Ambassador raised this incident with VFM Le Van Bang December 2 during the latter's meeting with Congressman Chris Smith (reported septel).

MARINE